



Writing skills



This is a hands on guide to writing and is meant to simplify the process of writing through lectures supported by exercise here. Paragraph writing is the cornerstone of other writing courses that usually consider the paragraph its building block. At a college level, it is required as a form of writing relevant to answering short notes.

A paragraph in general focuses on a single idea expressed in a topic sentence that is supported by other sentences.

A paragraph is a series of sentences that are organized and coherent and are all related to a single topic. Almost every piece of writing you do that is longer than a few sentences should be organized into paragraphs. This is because paragraphs show a reader where the subdivisions of an essay begin and end, and thus help the reader see the organization of the essay and grasp its main points.

Paragraphs can contain many different kinds of information. A paragraph could contain a series of brief examples or a single long illustration of a general point. It might describe a place, character, or process; narrate a series of events; compare or contrast two or more things; classify items into categories; or describe causes and effects. Regardless of the kind of information they contain, all paragraphs share certain characteristics. One of the most important of these is a topic sentence.

TOPIC SENTENCES

A well-organized paragraph supports or develops a single controlling idea, which is expressed in a sentence called the topic sentence. A topic sentence has several important functions: it substantiates or supports an essay's thesis statement; it unifies the content of a paragraph and directs the order of the sentences; and it advises the reader of the subject to be discussed and how the paragraph will discuss it. Readers generally look to the first few sentences in a paragraph to determine the subject and perspective of the paragraph. That's why it's often best to put the topic sentence at the very beginning of the paragraph. In some cases, however, it's more effective to place another sentence before the topic sentence—for example, a sentence linking the current paragraph to the previous one, or one providing background information.

Although most paragraphs should have a topic sentence, there are a few situations when a paragraph might not need a topic sentence. For example, you might be able to omit a topic sentence in a paragraph that narrates a series of events, if a paragraph continues developing an idea that you introduced (with a topic sentence) in the previous paragraph, or if all the sentences and details in a paragraph clearly refer—perhaps indirectly—to a main point. The vast majority of your paragraphs, however, should have a topic sentence.

PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE

Most paragraphs in an essay have a three-part structure—introduction, body, and conclusion. You can see this structure in paragraphs whether they are narrating, describing, comparing, contrasting, or analyzing information. Each part of the paragraph plays an important role in communicating your meaning to your reader.

Introduction: the first section of a paragraph; should include the topic sentence and any other sentences at the beginning of the paragraph that give background information or provide a transition.

Body: follows the introduction; discusses the controlling idea, using facts, arguments, analysis, examples, and other information.

Conclusion: the final section; summarizes the connections between the information discussed in the body of the paragraph and the paragraph's controlling idea.

The following paragraph illustrates this pattern of organization. In this paragraph the topic sentence and concluding sentence (CAPITALIZED) both help the reader keep the paragraph's main point in mind.

SCIENTISTS HAVE LEARNED TO SUPPLEMENT THE SENSE OF SIGHT IN NUMEROUS WAYS. In front of the tiny pupil of the eye they put, on Mount Palomar, a great monacle 200 inches in diameter, and with it see 2000 times farther into the depths of space. Or they look through a small pair of lenses arranged as a microscope into a drop of water or blood, and magnify by as much as 2000 diameters the living creatures there, many of which are among man's most dangerous enemies. Or, if we want to see distant happenings on earth, they use some of the previously wasted electromagnetic waves to carry television images which they re-create as light by whipping tiny crystals on a screen with electrons in a vacuum. Or they can bring happenings of long ago and far away as colored motion pictures, by arranging silver atoms and color-absorbing molecules to force light waves into the patterns of original reality. Or if we want to see into the center of a steel casting or the chest of an injured child, they send the information on a beam of penetrating short-wave X rays, and then convert it back into images we can see on a screen or photograph. **THUS ALMOST EVERY TYPE OF ELECTROMAGNETIC RADIATION YET DISCOVERED HAS BEEN USED TO EXTEND OUR SENSE OF SIGHT IN SOME WAY.**

George Harrison, "Faith and the Scientist"

COHERENCE

In a coherent paragraph, each sentence relates clearly to the topic sentence or controlling idea, but there is more to coherence than this. If a paragraph is coherent, each sentence flows smoothly into the next without obvious shifts or jumps. A coherent paragraph also highlights the ties between old information and new information to make the structure of ideas or arguments clear to the reader.

Along with the smooth flow of sentences, a paragraph's coherence may also be related to its length. If you have written a very long paragraph, one that fills a double-spaced typed page, for example, you should check it carefully to see if it should start a new paragraph where the original paragraph wanders from its controlling idea. On the other hand, if a paragraph is very short (only one or two sentences, perhaps), you may need to develop its controlling idea more thoroughly, or combine it with another paragraph.

A number of other techniques that you can use to establish coherence in paragraphs are described below.

Repeat key words or phrases. Particularly in paragraphs in which you define or identify an important idea or theory, be consistent in how you refer to it. This consistency and repetition will bind the paragraph together and help your reader understand your definition or description.

Create parallel structures. Parallel structures are created by constructing two or more phrases or sentences that have the same grammatical structure and use the same parts of speech. By creating parallel structures you make your sentences clearer and easier to read. In addition, repeating a pattern in a series of consecutive sentences helps your reader see the connections between ideas. In the paragraph above about scientists and the sense of sight, several sentences in the body of the paragraph have been constructed in a parallel way. The parallel structures (which have been emphasized) help the reader see that the paragraph is organized as a set of examples of a general statement.

Be consistent in point of view, verb tense, and number. Consistency in point of view, verb tense, and number is a subtle but important aspect of coherence. If you shift from the more personal "you" to the impersonal "one," from past to present tense, or from "a man" to "they," for example, you make your paragraph less coherent. Such inconsistencies can also confuse your reader and make your argument more difficult to follow.

Use transition words or phrases between sentences and between paragraphs. Transitional expressions emphasize the relationships between ideas, so they help readers follow your train of thought or see connections that they might otherwise miss or misunderstand. The following paragraph shows how carefully chosen transitions (CAPITALIZED) lead the reader smoothly from the introduction to the conclusion of the paragraph.

I don't wish to deny that the flattened, minuscule head of the large-bodied "stegosaurus" houses little brain from our subjective, top-heavy perspective, BUT I do wish to assert that we should not expect more of the beast. FIRST OF ALL, large animals have relatively smaller brains than related, small animals. The correlation of brain size with body size among kindred animals (all reptiles, all mammals, FOR EXAMPLE) is remarkably regular. AS we move from small to large animals, from mice to elephants or small lizards to Komodo dragons, brain size increases, BUT not so fast as body size. IN OTHER WORDS, bodies grow faster than brains, AND large animals have low ratios of brain weight to body weight. IN FACT, brains grow only about two-thirds as fast as bodies. SINCE we have no reason to believe that large animals are consistently stupider than their smaller relatives, we must conclude that large animals require relatively less brain to do as well as smaller animals. IF we do not recognize this relationship, we are likely to underestimate the mental power of very large animals, dinosaurs in particular.

Stephen Jay Gould, "Were Dinosaurs Dumb?"

SOME USEFUL TRANSITIONS

To show addition:

again, and, also, besides, equally important, first (second, etc.), further, furthermore, in addition, in the first place, moreover, next, too

To give examples:

for example, for instance, in fact, specifically, that is, to illustrate

To compare:

also, in the same manner, likewise, similarly

To contrast:

although, and yet, at the same time, but, despite, even though, however, in contrast, in spite of, nevertheless, on the contrary, on the other hand, still, though, yet

To summarize or conclude:

all in all, in conclusion, in other words, in short, in summary, on the whole, that is, therefore, to sum up

To show time:

after, afterward, as, as long as, as soon as, at last, before, during, earlier, finally, formerly, immediately, later, meanwhile, next, since, shortly, subsequently, then, thereafter, until, when, while

To show place or direction:

above, below, beyond, close, elsewhere, farther on, here, nearby, opposite, to the left (north, etc.)

To indicate logical relationship:

accordingly, as a result, because, consequently, for this reason, hence, if, otherwise, since, so,

1 EXERCISES ON PARAGRAPH WRITING

A) TOPIC SENTENCES The topic sentence is the most important sentence of a paragraph. It states the main idea and introduces the reader to the topic. 1. CHOOSING TOPIC SENTENCES Choose the best topic sentence for each group of supporting sentences.

Write it on the line provided. Example:

_____ b _____. I usually go skiing every weekend in the winter even though it is expensive. I love the feeling of flying down a mountain. The views are beautiful from the top of a mountain and along the trails. Even the danger of falling and getting hurt can't keep me away from the slopes on a winter day. a) Skiing is expensive. b) Skiing is my favourite sport. c) Skiing is dangerous. 1.)

_____.

North Americans send cards for many occasions. They send cards to family and friends on birthdays and holidays. They also send thank-you cards, get well cards, graduation cards, and congratulation cards. It is very common to buy cards in stores and send them through the mail, but turning on the computer and sending cards over the Internet is also popular. a) Sending cards is very popular in North America. b) Birthday cards are the most popular kind of card. c) It is important to send thank-you cards.

2 2.) _____ . I enjoy summer sports like water skiing and baseball. The weather is usually sunny and hot, so I can go to the beach almost every day. Gardening is my hobby and I spend many summer days working in my garden. Unfortunately, the days pass too quickly in summer. a) I like to garden in summer. b) Summer is my favourite season. c) Summer is too short. 3.)

_____ . First of all, we

need money to repair old roads and build new roads. We also need more to pay teachers' salaries and to pay for services such as trash collection. Finally, more tax money is needed to give financial help to the poor citizens of the city. It is clear that the city will have serious problems if taxes are not raised soon. a) We should raise city taxes. b) City taxes are too high. c) City taxes pay for new roads. 4.) _____ . For example, a person can have breakfast in New York, board an airplane, and have dinner in Paris. A businesswoman in London can instantly place an order with a factory in Hong Kong by sending a fax. Furthermore, a schoolboy in Tokyo can turn on a TV and watch a baseball game being played in Los Angeles. a) Airplanes have changed our lives. b) Advances in technology have made the world seem smaller. c) The fax machine was an important invention. 5.)

_____ . One thing you must consider is the quality of the university's educational program. You also need to think about the school's size and location. Finally, you must be sure to consider the university's tuition to make sure you can afford to go to school there. a) It is expensive to attend a university in the United States. b) There are several factors to consider when you choose a university to attend. c) You should consider getting a good education. 3 2. WRITING A TOPIC SENTENCE Write a topic sentence for each paragraph. Make sure your topic sentence expresses the main idea of the paragraph. Example: Miami is the perfect place to take a vacation. It is always sunny and warm. The beaches are gorgeous, with soft white sand and beautiful water. There are many fine restaurants in the Miami area, and most of the hotels offer terrific entertainment nightly. It's no wonder that Miami is my first choice for a vacation destination. 1.)

He has collected stamps and coins ever since he was a child. He is very proud of his valuable collections. Paul also enjoys painting and drawing. Recently he has become interested in gardening. Out of all his hobbies, Paul's favourite one is reading. He usually reads at least one book every week. Paul keeps busy with all of his hobbies. 2.)

. I can't wait to come home from school and eat the delicious meals she has prepared. She is famous for her desserts like peach pie and chocolate soufflé. She is always experimenting with new recipes and trying different ingredients. No one in the world can cook the way my mother does. 3.)

. It never starts in cold weather. The horn and the left turn signal don't work properly. Worst of all, the radio only gets one station and the CD player is completely broken. I wish I could get a new car. 4.)

. First and most importantly, the work is very interesting. I learn new things every day and I get to travel a lot. In addition, my boss is very nice. She is always willing to help me when I have a problem. I have also made many new friends at my job. Last, but not least, the salary is fantastic. 5.)

. To start things off, my plane was six hours late. When I finally got to my hotel, I was very disappointed. It was small and dirty. On the third day, my wallet was 4 stolen, and I lost all my credit cards. It rained very day except one, and on that day I got a terrible sunburn. All in all, it wasn't a vacation to remember. B)

SUPPORTING SENTENCES The supporting sentences develop the main idea in the topic sentence. They add details to the topic. 3.
RECOGNIZING SUPPORTING SENTENCES Read the following paragraphs and underline the supporting sentences. 1.)

Use of the internet has grown very quickly. In 1983, there were 562 computers connected to the Internet. By the turn of the century, there were 72.3 million computers in 247 countries on-line. Experts say that the Internet is now growing at a rate of approximately 40 percent a year. As time goes on, the Internet is becoming more and more popular.

2.) There are many reasons I hate my apartment. The plumbing doesn't work properly and the landlord refuses to fix it. I also have noisy neighbours who keep me up all night. Furthermore, there are so many bugs in my apartment that I could start an insect collection. I really want to move.

3.) Vegetables and fruits are an important part of a healthy diet. First, fruits and vegetables are packed with the vitamins and minerals you need to keep your body functioning smoothly. In addition, they give you the carbohydrates you need for energy. Fruits and vegetables have lots of fiber to help your digestive system work properly. Finally, many scientists believe that the nutrients in fruits and vegetables can help fight diseases. If you eat a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, you'll be on the road to better health.

5 C) IRRELEVANT SENTENCES Every supporting sentence in a paragraph must relate to the main idea stated in the topic sentence. A sentence that does not support the main idea does not belong in the paragraph, thus such a sentence should be omitted. When a sentence does not belong in a paragraph, it is called an irrelevant sentence. Example: The students in the class come from many different party of the world. Some are from European countries, such s France, Spain, and Italy. Others are from Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia and Israel. Still other students were born in Asian countries, including Japan and Korea. Korean food is delicious. The largest number of students is from Latin American countries like Mexico, Venezuela and Peru. The class is an interesting mix of people from many different countries.

4. RECOGNIZING IRRELEVANT SENTENCES

There is one irrelevant sentence in each paragraph that follows.

Find that sentence and cross it out. 1.) There are several ways people can conserve natural resources. One way is to turn lights off and appliances when they are not in use. Another way is to drive cars less. My favourite kind of car is convertible. People can also insulate their houses better. Finally, by reusing things like bottles and plastic bags, people can reduce the amount of waste. By practicing these simple guidelines, we can save our natural resources. 2.) Cats make wonderful house pets. They are very loving and friendly. Cats are also clean. They don't eat much, so they are not expensive. Unfortunately, some people are allergic to their hair. Cats look beautiful and they're fun to have in your home. 3.) The capital city of a country is usually a very important city. The government offices are located in the capital city and political leaders usually live there nearby. There are many different types of governments in the world. The capital may also be the centre of culture. There are often museums, libraries, and universities in the capital. Finally, the capital city can serve as a centre of trade, industry and commerce, so it is often the financial centre of the country. 6 4.) The Japanese automobile industry uses robots in many stages of its production process. In fact, one large Japanese auto factory uses robots in all of its production stages. Some Japanese universities are developing medical robots to detect certain kinds of cancer. Another automobile factory in Japan uses them to paint cars as they come off the assembly line. Furthermore, most Japanese factories use robots to weld the parts of the finished car together. 5.) The packaging of many products is very wasteful. Often the packaging is twice as big as the product. Packaging is used to protect things that are breakable. Many food items, for example, have several layers of extra packaging. Most of these extra layers could be eliminated. D) CONCLUDING SENTENCES Some paragraphs end with a concluding sentence.

This sentence states the main idea of the paragraph again using different words. It summarizes the main points of the paragraph, or makes a final comment on the topic. Concluding sentences are not always necessary. In fact, short paragraphs that are part of longer pieces of writing often do not have concluding sentences. 5.

WRITING CONCLUDING SENTENCES Write a concluding sentence for each paragraph. 1.) There are many reasons why I like wearing a uniform to school. First of all, it saves time. I don't have to spend time picking out my clothes every morning. Wearing a uniform also saves money. It's cheaper to purchase a new uniform than to go out and buy lots of school clothes. In addition, I don't have the pressure of keeping up with the latest styles. Most importantly, wearing a school uniform gives me a sense that I belong. I really think that it adds to the feeling of school spirit and community.

_____ . 7 2.)

There are many reasons why I am against wearing a school uniform. For one thing, I don't like the style of the uniform. The navy blazer and plaid skirt are too conservative for me. Secondly, the uniform isn't comfortable. I prefer to wear baggy pants and a sweater instead of a skirt and a jacket. Finally, I want the freedom to express my individuality through my style of dressing.

_____ . 3.) Credit cards

have a lot of advantages. First of all, credit cards are convenient because you don't have to carry a lot of cash around. You can buy the products and services you need even if you do not have cash in your pocket. In addition, credit cards are very helpful in emergencies. Finally, you can become a better money manager as you learn to use credit cards responsibly.

_____ . 8 THE KEY: 1.

CHOOSING TOPIC SENTENCES: 1a, 2b, 3a, 4 b 5 b. 2.

WRITING A TOPIC SENTENCE: Suggested answers: 1.) Paul

has many hobbies. (Instead of ‘many’ you can use: a lot of, several) 2.) My mother is great cook. (Instead of ‘great’ you can use similar adjectives: very good, fantastic) , also: My mother’s cooking is very good. 3.) I have (got) problems with my car. Also: I have difficulties / troubles with my car. 4.) I have (got) a great job. (Also: I have (got) a fantastic / perfect / a very good job. 5.) My holidays / vacations were a disaster. (Also: My vacations / holidays were disastrous / terrible.)

3. RECOGNIZING SUPPORTING SENTENCES 1.) Use of the internet has grown very quickly. In 1983, there were 562 computers connected to the Internet. By the turn of the century, there were 72.3 million computers in 247 countries on-line. Experts say that the Internet is now growing at a rate of approximately 40 percent a year. As time goes on, the Internet is becoming more and more popular. 2. There are many reasons I hate my apartment. The plumbing doesn’t work properly and the landlord refuses to fix it. I also have noisy neighbours who keep me up all night. Furthermore, there are so many bugs in my apartment that I could start an insect collection. I really want to move. 3.) Vegetables and fruits are an important part of a healthy diet. First, fruits and vegetables are packed with the vitamins and minerals you need to keep your body functioning smoothly. In addition, they give you the carbohydrates you need for energy. Fruits and vegetables have lots of fiber to help your digestive system work properly. Finally, many scientists believe that the nutrients in fruits and vegetables can help fight diseases. If you eat a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, you’ll be on the road to better health. 4. RECOGNIZING IRRELEVANT SENTENCES 1.) My favourite kind of car is convertible. 2.) Unfortunately, some people are allergic to their hair. 3.) There are many different types of governments in the world. 4.) Some Japanese universities are developing medical robots to detect certain kinds of cancer. 5.) Packaging is used to protect things that are breakable. 6.

WRITING CONCLUDING SENTENCES Suggested answers: 1.) I am happy that we have to wear a uniform to school. (Answers can vary.) 2.) I am not keen on wearing a uniform to school. / I don't like to wear a uniform to school. / I am not fond of wearing a uniform to school. (Answers can vary.) 3.) Credit cards are my favourite means of payment. / Credit cards are the best means of payment. (Answers can vary.) Source: Blanchard, K. in Root, C. 2003. Ready to Write. NY: Pearson Education - Longman.

Chapter 2: Prewriting

Learning Objectives

- Understand the purpose of prewriting.
- Identify your own writing practices as linear or associative.
- Practise the three suggested prewriting options—outline, mind map, and freewriting—in different writing situations.

Many of us write haphazardly, using strategies we may have evolved as beginning learners. There is something incredibly frustrating in sitting and looking at a blank page, waiting for inspiration to strike. Wondering what to write about and how to start are normal parts of the writing process, and they happen to everyone—even people who make their living as writers. How can you get past the blank page? Prewriting can help. The following strategies—outlines, mind maps, and freewriting—may or may not work for you. Even if they don't, however, they can help spark ideas for what will—and free you from the dreaded blank page.

2.1 Outlines

Some writers swear by outlines; others loathe them. When assigned an outline in school, I would simply write the assignment, then extract the outline afterward. To this day, I'm an associative rather than a linear writer, whether I'm crafting an assignment description or revising a poem. If this also describes you, try the two techniques later in this chapter: [Chapter 2.2: Mind Maps](#) and [Chapter 2.3: Freewriting](#).

If you find outlines helpful, or if you don't know yet, you can try using one for your next assignment.

First, set aside a line for each of the things you already know you might need, like an introduction and a conclusion. If your instructor has told you to include a bibliography, add that, too.

Now think about what you'll be putting in the body of your assignment. Decide on the number of paragraphs you'll need and number each one. Then jot a quick note describing what each paragraph will be about.

Finally, leave room for three points for each paragraph and describe what each point will say. Each point should help explain the overall topic of the paragraph.

Don't be afraid to stray from your outline if needed. Writing is a discovery process, and change is part of that process. If your outline doesn't conform to your finished project, good! You learned something along the way.

Review Questions

1. With a classmate, decide whether your writing process so far has been more linear (knowing exactly what you're going to write before you start, writing in a straight line from A to Z) or associative (starting without much of a plan and figuring it out as you go along). Which style do you prefer? Why?
2. Write an outline for an assignment on the topic of future challenges in immigration to Canada.

Chapter 2: Prewriting

2.2 Mind Maps

People who like to think visually and who have a harder time establishing order over their writing process tend to enjoy mind maps. A mind map can be used not only for an assignment, but:

- to capture a conversation around a group presentation.
- to take lecture notes.
- to help you with your ideas for a creative project, like a poem or a story.

You'll use mind maps again in [Chapter 6: Creative Writing](#).

To create a mind map, take a blank sheet of paper. Write your central idea in the middle and draw a circle around it. Then begin adding other circles to the paper around the main idea, each one with a different sub-idea, example, or thought in it. Don't worry about consciously deciding on the relative size of the circles or where they should go in relation to the central idea, but if this happens easily, let it. Draw lines to indicate the relationships between the central idea, sub-ideas, examples, and thoughts. By the end, your mind map should look sort of like a giant, blobby Starship *Enterprise* from *Star Trek*.

Review Questions

1. Write a mind map on a topic of your choice. Suggested topics are the importance of exposure to nature for city dwellers; the importance of individual versus government or corporate steps to

combat climate change; or the importance of learning relationship and communication skills as part of the high school curriculum.

2. In groups, choose a different topic from the one you considered in question 1 and talk about it together. Create a mind map of the conversation.

2.3 Freewriting

Freewriting is a form of brainstorming. Whether you have been given a topic by your instructor to write on, and your mind is blank, or you have been told to pick your own topic, and your mind is also blank, you can use this technique.

Freewriting involves writing for a certain amount of time—say, ten minutes—without taking your pen off the page. This means that you write down anything that comes to mind, even if that is “This is a really stupid exercise. I don’t know why I’m doing it. Wow, am I bored.”

The goal is to continue writing for the specified time. There is only one rule: do not stop writing, even for a minute, during the specified time period. Your job is not to think about what you are writing, but to write. Afterwards, you’ll have a chance to go over what you wrote and pick out your favourite parts.

Review Questions

Try freewriting on a topic of your choice, or on one of the topics you didn’t choose for a previous question. After ten minutes, read over the freewriting you completed and underline any words, phrases, or sentences that stick out to you. Is there a way you could turn what you wrote into the start of an assignment, a question you want to answer, or a take on the topic that you are interested in exploring further?

3.1 Descriptive Paragraphs

Learning Objectives

- Understand and utilize the descriptive language associated with the five senses.
- Conceptualize the difference between showing the reader and telling the reader.
- Identify the different types of descriptive paragraphs: person, place, object, and event.
- Describe a person, a place, an object, or an event adequately and concisely.
- Master the organizational schemes associated with descriptive paragraphs.
- Indicate in writing the significance of a person, place, object, and event.

A descriptive paragraph provides a vibrant experience for the reader through vivid language and descriptions of something. Unlike narrative paragraphs, which must include personal thoughts, feelings, and growth, descriptive paragraphs do not need to be personal in nature. Instead, descriptive paragraphs must focus on vividly and objectively describing something to the reader. In order to provide this vivid detail, the writer must use language that appeals to the reader’s five

senses: sight, smell, sound, taste, and touch. To appeal to these senses, the writer must use descriptive language, usually in the form of adjectives, that describes the sensations felt by the senses. For instance, examine the differences between the descriptions below:

Sentence 1: The tree was tall and green.

Sentence 2: The soft and damp pink flowers of the dogwood tree smelled sweet in the cool spring air as the wind whistled through its yellow-green leaves.

How do these descriptions compare? If these two sentences both describe the same tree, which sentence provides a better picture for the reader? Why?

While the first description does provide some detail (that the tree is both “tall” and “green”), it does not help the reader picture the tree. Saying that the tree is “tall” and “green” does not help separate the tree being described from any other tree. The second sentence, however, provides the reader with descriptive information that makes the tree unique. Unlike the writer of the first sentence, who only vaguely describes how the tree looked, the writer of the second sentence appeals to at least four of the reader’s five senses. This writer describes how the tree feels (soft and damp), how the tree smells (sweet), how the tree sounds (it whistles), and how the tree looks (pink and yellow-green). Through these descriptions, the reader can see, hear, feel, and smell the tree while reading the sentence. However, in some instances, not all of the senses will be applicable for the description. In this case, most descriptions of trees would not include a sense of how the tree tasted, especially when so many trees are inedible or poisonous!

Table 3.1 Words associated with each of the five senses

See	Hear	Smell	Taste	Feel
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • colours (green, blue, red) • contrast (light vs. dark) • depth (near vs. far) • texture (rough, pebbly, smooth) • shape (round, square, triangular) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • loud • grating • metallic • atonal • melodic • euphonious • discordant • screeching • gravelly • harmonious 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sweet • pungent • acrid • delicious • disgusting • appetizing • fresh • stale • fruity • tantalizing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • delicious • sour • sweet • savoury • salty • spoiled • bitter • earthy • spicy • bland 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • soft • creamy • rubbery • firm • cool/hot • unctuous • porous/smooth • knobby • sticky • dry/moist

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dimensions (height, width, length) 				
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Providing good details in a descriptive paragraph also rests on the idea that a writer must *show* and not *tell* the reader. While good details in a paragraph are important, the most essential part of a descriptive paragraph is the reason for writing the paragraph. Since descriptive paragraphs should explain to the reader the importance of what is being described, in addition to helping the reader picture it, the author must show the reader how and why something is significant rather than simply telling the reader. A good writer helps the reader picture what they are describing; however, a better writer shows the reader the purpose or reason for describing something. Consider the differences between the sentences below:

Example 1: Ever since grade school, I have always been nervous during tests.

Example 2: Staring blankly at my exam, I tapped my pencil rapidly on the side of my desk and desperately tried to focus. Mustering up some courage, I wrote an answer to the second question. Just as quickly, I erased the answer frantically, not wanting to leave a trace of it on the blank white paper. As the teacher announced that time was almost up, I remembered the taunt of my evil grade-school teacher: “You’ll never pass this test. Just give up already.” The memory of her words paralyzed my mind. Even more panic-stricken than before, I stared wildly at my blank test, trying to remember what the teacher had said in class last week or what I had read in the textbook.

While the first example does not explain how the narrator is nervous, it also fails to show why this nervousness is important. Ultimately, the first example tells and does not show the reader how the narrator is nervous or why this reaction is important. Meanwhile, the second example not only shows how the narrator expresses this nervousness (tapping the pencil on the desk, erasing answers, etc.), it begins to show why this is significant by relating it to earlier experiences in the narrator’s life. Through this connection, the writer is beginning to develop the description and the importance of the test-taking nervousness. The second example describes the experiences from grade school that led to this current bout of test-taking anxiety.

By showing and not telling the reader and by using descriptive language that appeals to the five senses, descriptive paragraphs provide the reader with a detailed account and the significance of something. Thus, this something being described is the most important aspect of the descriptive paragraph. Generally, descriptive paragraphs describe one of four somethings: a person, a place, an object, or an event.

Chapter 3: Paragraph Structure

3.2 Narrative Paragraphs

Learning Objectives

- Identify the differences in form between descriptive and narrative paragraphs.
- Know the major differences between autobiographical and biographical narratives.
- Recognize the structure of autobiographical and biographical narratives.
- Identify the importance of personal growth in a narrative paragraph.
- Stress the importance of personal growth within your own narrative paragraph.

Unlike descriptive paragraphs—which strive to explain why a person, place, object, or event is important—a narrative paragraph demonstrates the development of a person through the chronological retelling of an important event. In addition, a narrative paragraph should indicate how a person has changed or learned from this experience. The experience should unfold much like the plot of a novel or short story, beginning with the individual facing a problem and ending in the resolution of the problem and subsequent growth of the individual. Thus, the action of the problem should unfold as the telling of the event unfolds, much like the action of a short story builds as the plot progresses.

However, just as in descriptive paragraphs, you must describe the event that is progressing, effectively drawing your readers into the development of the individual. Think of how invested—or perhaps uninvested—you become in the stories you read. Why do you connect with certain characters and not with others? Often, you connect with characters you feel you can relate to in some way or with events that you can imagine experiencing. Thus, it is essential to clearly and concisely indicate the action of the event being described. Your readers must be able to imagine being at and participating in the event. However, you must keep in mind that you can provide too much information to the reader. Make sure all the details you provide are relevant to the narration. For instance, when narrating an event, you do not need to include details that do not add to the feeling of an event. Otherwise, the readers will feel unconnected to and uninterested in the development of the individual.

While describing the event is crucial to the reader's understanding and interest, the subject's feelings, thoughts, desires, or insights are integral to creating the sense of personal growth. Without these components, the reader will be unable to track the person's development and change. Essentially, in order for the reader to see that the individual has transformed, you must present the inner thoughts, desires, and feelings of the person before and after the alleged transformation. This way, the reader can compare the thoughts and feelings from before the change with those after and ultimately evaluate the personal growth of the individual on their own.

Since the personal growth in the narrative is the most essential component, choosing the individual and experiences is an important decision. As a writer hoping to engage the reader, you must carefully consider both the events and the individual that you choose. Not only must you choose an event that points toward eventual personal growth, but you must also choose an individual who is compelling. Generally, a narrative paragraph can either be autobiographical or biographical in nature. That is, the narrative can be written by you and about you, or the narrative

can be written by you and about someone else. Moreover, in choosing to write about yourself or about someone else, you decide the organization of your paragraph.

3.3 Expository Paragraphs

Learning Objectives

- Provide evidence that supports a thesis, including relevant information on varying perspectives.
- Articulate concepts and information correctly and concisely.
- Decide the significance and merit of different facts, concepts and data.
- Organize an expository paragraph.

The main aim of an expository paragraph is to provide an effective explanation of a topic. While a descriptive paragraph strives to describe a subject and a narrative paragraph seeks to show personal growth, an expository paragraph tries to explain a topic or situation. Thus, expository paragraphs are written as if the writer is explaining or clarifying a topic to the reader. Since an expository paragraph is trying to clarify a topic, it is important that its sentences provide the categories or reasons that support the clarification of the topic. Moreover, these categories and reasons also provide the framework for the organization of the paragraph.

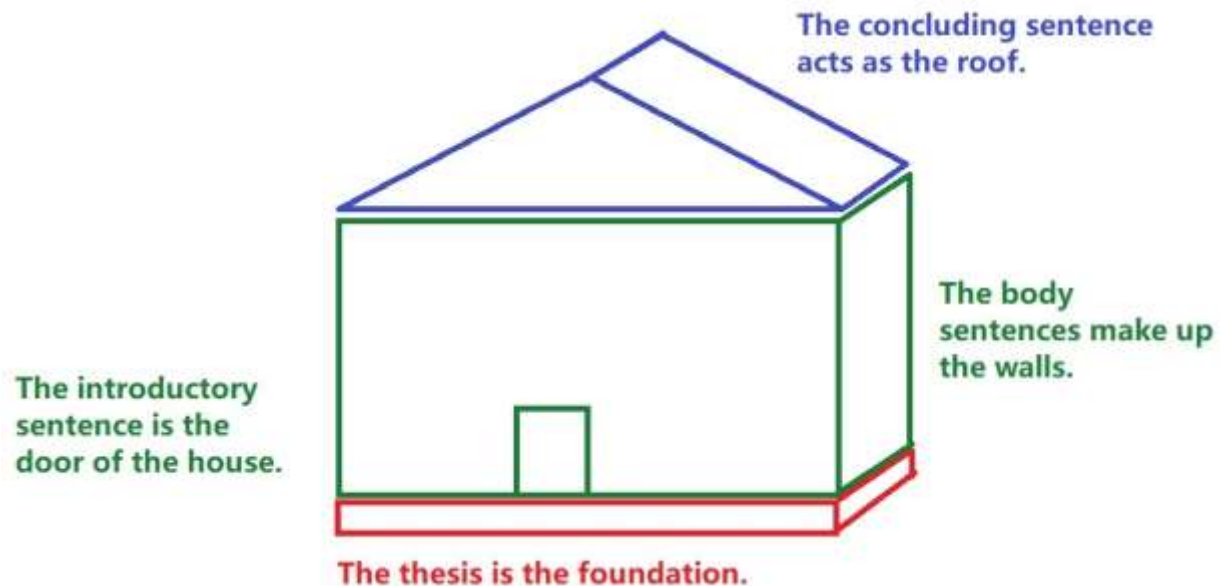


Figure 3.1 Components of the expository paragraph as the parts of a house.

Much like the categories are essential to clarifying the topic, organization is the key to any well-developed paragraph. When composing your paragraph, think of its organization as a house, with each major part of a house representing a component of a paragraph. Just as the foundation provides support on which a house can be built, a thesis represents the foundation upon which to build a paragraph. The introductory sentence then functions as both the door and the framework for an expository paragraph. Like a house door, the introductory sentence must allow the reader

to enter the paragraph. Additionally, just as walls are built upon the framework of a house, the body sentences of a paragraph are organized around the framework or the organizational scheme that is presented in the introductory sentence. The body sentences, much like the walls of a house, must be firm, strong and complete. Finally, a paragraph must include a concluding sentence that tops off the paragraph, much like a roof completes a house. As the roof cements the structure of the house and helps hold the walls in place, the concluding sentence must sum up the point of your body sentences and complete the paragraph.

Although the overall organization of an expository paragraph is important, you must also understand the organization of each component (the introductory, body, and concluding sentences) of your paragraph. The sections below identify the essential parts of each component of your paragraph, explaining the necessary information for each type of sentence.

While the guidelines listed below may feel constrictive, they are merely meant to guide you as a writer. Ultimately, the guidelines should help you write more effectively. The more familiar you become with how to organize a paragraph, the more energy you can focus on your ideas and your writing. As a result, your writing will improve as your ability to organize your ideas improves. Plus, focusing your energy on your argument and ideas rather than the organization makes your job as a writer more exciting and fun.

Chapter 3: Paragraph Structure

3.4 Persuasive Paragraphs

Learning Objectives

- Organize arguments in a logical and persuasive order.
- Provide appropriate support in the form of quotations, statistics, expert opinions, and commonly accepted facts
- Clarify the meaning and significance of the main arguments.
- Identify and refute relevant counterpoints.

The main aim of a persuasive paragraph is to make an effective argument. Thus, persuasive paragraphs are written as if the writer is attempting to convince their audience to adopt a new belief or behaviour. While expository paragraphs strive to explain or clarify a topic, persuasive paragraphs take a stand on an issue. However, simply having an argument or viewpoint about a topic is not enough. In persuasive paragraphs, writers must also support their claims. Typically, persuasive paragraphs support their arguments through the use of appropriate evidence, such as quotations, examples, expert opinions, or other facts. Nevertheless, simply having a viewpoint and supporting evidence is still not enough to write a strong persuasive paragraph. In addition to these two things, a writer must also have strong organization.

Organization is the key to any well-developed paragraph. When composing your paragraph, think of its organization as a set of blocks balanced between two triangles (see Figure 3.2). Each block represents the main arguments of your paragraph, while the two triangles stand for your

introductory and concluding sentences, respectively. Just as the top triangle comes to a point before leading into the blocks, your introductory sentence should make your thesis before your paragraph jumps to the supporting sentences. These supporting sentences, as the blocks suggest, should be full of information and logically solid. Just as the stability and balance of the shapes rests on the solidity of the blocks, the stability of the argument of the paragraph rests on the success of the body sentences. Much like the introductory sentence that precedes it, your concluding sentence should restate your thesis statement and the main argument of your paragraph, allowing your paragraph to end on a firm base.

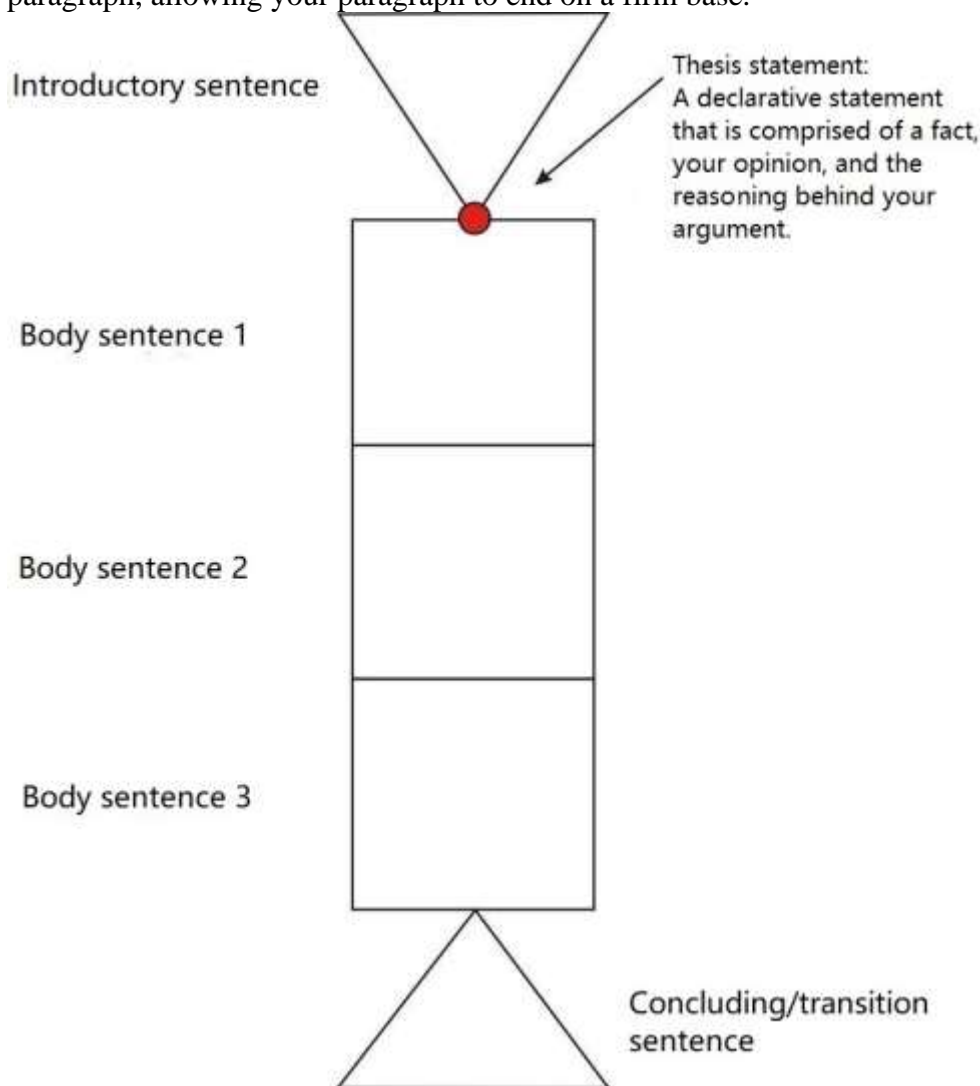


Figure 3.2 A

representation of the organization of a persuasive paragraph.

The sections below identify the major components of each part of a persuasive paragraph. Keep in mind that these guidelines are not meant to hinder your voice as a writer, but rather to strengthen your effectiveness as a writer. Though you may sometimes feel constricted by this organizational framework, it is essential to compose a paragraph that contains all of these parts in order to make a strong argument. Plus, once you get acquainted with how to organize a persuasive paragraph, you will be able to use your creative juices in the actual writing of the

paragraph. Rather than focusing on where to put an idea, you can focus on how to express or explain, which makes your job as a writer easier and more exciting.

Introductory Sentences

Body Sentences

Concluding Sentences

Chapter 4: Summary

Learning Objectives

- Identify the main idea and relevant details in summarizing another’s writing.
- Indicate your own point of view while fairly representing your source’s ideas.
- Accurately summarize while selecting details relevant to your argument.
- Write an interesting first sentence of your summary.
- Make a strong counterargument and refute it.

Summary often seems like a low-level skill, hardly worth practising. After all, we’ve been doing it our whole lives. “That book looks interesting. What’s it about?” Simply answering such a question, however casually, requires us to accurately summarize the plot, characters, and narrative in a sentence or two so our questioner gets a sense of the book’s flavour.

Summary, however, is also the underpinning of academic writing. That’s because, before you can engage with the work of others—the knowledge that came before—you have to represent it to your reader, who likely hasn’t done the research you have and is thus relying on you to bring them up to speed.